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AUTHOR Garvin, Alfred D.; Manney, Agnes A.
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ABSTRACT

On the assumption that the absence of remedial students in the classroom permits enriched instruction to take place, this study examined the reading achievement gains of those first graders who remain in the classroom while their project-eligible classmates leave for reading instruction. Metropolitan Readiness Test stanine scores were used for pretest and the Metrcpolitan Achievement Test (Reading) stanine scores were used for posttest. Polling 23 schools, the nonproject children gained an average of over one stanine and the school-to-school average gains ranged from 3.28 to -0.48 stanines. Neither the amount of preschool training nor the range of prior ability among these nonproject children explained any of this variation in gains. School visits after the project disclosed that the greatest gains occurred when the project children left the classroom in a group, while the least gains cccurred when they left intermittently throughout the day. Study results support the conclusion that the pattern of scheduling remedial instruction for the project children affects educational experiences of the nonproject children in the same classes. (Author/MAI)

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Reading Achievement of Non-Project First Graders in ESEA Title I Project Schools

Alfred D. Garvin and Agnes A. Manney
University of Cincinnati

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Many remedial education projects involve identifying some underachieving subgroup of a larger intact group, separating this target subgroup from the larger group, and applying some remedial treatment to them. As might be expected, the evaluation of such a project is usually limited to assessing the effects of the remedial treatment on the subjects who received it. The reasoning behind the study reported here is that the separation of these underachievers from the larger group amounts to an indirect but potentially beneficial treatment for the rest of the group. In very general terms, this study sought to assess the effects of being in the "control group" while the rest of your group are receiving a remedial treatment.

The ESEA Title I remedial reading project is an example of the kind of project just described. To be eligible to participate in the ESEA Title I remedial program, a beginning first grader must have scored below stanine 4 on an appropriate reading readiness test and also meet other criteria that indicate substantial academic jeopardy. These project children leave their regular classroom, whether singly or en masse, during a portion of each day to receive their remedial instruction. Where the project children leave en masse, the regular classroom teacher has the opportunity to give individualized or otherwise enriched instruction to the smaller number of more able children who remain. If this opportunity is used in this way, the non-project children are, indeed, receiving a potentially beneficial "treatment." However, if the regular classroom teacher tends to kill time with "busy work" until the project children return, the non-project children are being denied even normal learning opportunities. Thus, while the opportunity to make extra educational gains is potentially available to all these non-project children, these gains may be realized unevenly across schools depending on how they use this opportunity.

This study compared first grade reading achievement standard scores with kindergarten reading readiness standard scores among first graders who attended ESEA Title I project schools but who were ineligible to participate in the remedial instruction program. Following the line of reasoning outlined above, it was hypothesized that they would show a significant gain in their first grade scores over their kindergarten scores, on average, but that these gains would vary widely across schools according to how this opportunity was used.

Further, in an effort to isolate the cause of the expected variation in gains across schools, two potentially explanatory factors were explored: different amounts of formal pre-school experience and different ranges of ability in different schools.

Method

Data Sources

Data were collected on all 747 non-project first graders in the 23 ESEA Title I elementary schools in the Cincinnati Public School system. In addition, an experienced elementary supervisor made post hoc observations at those schools where non-project children showed the greatest gains and those where they showed the least gains.

Procedure

In May of their kindergarten year each child in this study was given the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). Their MRT-Total stanine scores were used as the pretest in this study. In April of their first grade year each child was given the Metropolitan Achievement Test--Primer Level (MAT). Their MAT-Reading subtest stanine scores were used as the post-test in this study. It should be noted that the MAT was given about two months later than the school month for which that test was normed and this would operate to inflate these MAT scores somewhat.

Each child's formal pre-school experience was classied as either Head Start plus all-day kindergarten, all-day kindergarten only, or half-day kindergarten only. These data were collected from students' records.

The post hoc on-site observations of those schools whose non-project children had made the greatest gains and those whose children had made the least gains were made immediately after these schools were identified through the posttests.

The methods of statistical analysis used are given where appropriate in the summary of results.

Results

The few non-project children with MRT (pretest) stanine scores of less than 4 or more than 6 were eliminated from the analysis of data because their MAT (posttest) scores would be most distorted by the regression effect that occurs between imperfectly correlated measures. Accordingly, the results reported here are based on the 562 non-project children who had MRT stanine scores of 4, 5, or 6.

The mean MAT-Reading score of these children was 1.06 stanines higher than their mean MRT-Total score. By a t test on correlated measures, this difference was significant at the .02 level ($t = 2.413$; df 561; 2-tailed $p < .02$). Discounting one-fifth of this gain to reflect the two months delay in giving the MAT, the remaining gain is still significant at the .05 level.

The standard deviation of the unweighted mean gains across the 23 ESEA Title I schools was .80 stanines, with a range of gains from +3.28 to -.48 stanines. Differences in the amount of formal pre-school experience did not explain any of this variation across schools. An ANOVA testing this

hypothesis yielded an $F<1$. Neither did the ranges of ability in different schools explain any of this variation. The product-moment correlation between the standard deviation of MRT scores and the mean gain in MAT over MRT scores, across schools, was -.17 (N = 23).

Conclusions

It was concluded that the non-project children studied here did show significantly higher reading achievement levels than would have been expected from their earlier reading readiness levels. It also seems reasonable to conclude that these results can be generalized to similar children in similar situations.

It was further concluded that the variation in gains across schools was due to both the way each school scheduled the departure of the project children from the classroom for their remedial instruction and how the regular classroom teachers handled the children who remained. The post hoc observations of the schools that showed the most and the least gains tended to confirm this conclusion.

In the five schools that showed the greatest gains the general rule was to have most or all of the project children leave the room en masse for a certain period. During this period the regular classroom teacher typically gave more individualized instruction to the remaining children. In the five schools that showed the least gains the general rule was to have only one or two project children leave the room at a time and to do this throughout the day. In these classes, conventional group instruction continued throughout the day.

We see here that a remedial instruction project intended to improve the reading achievement of its "project" children operates indirectly to improve the reading achievement of the "non-project" children in the same classes. However, we also see that the degree of benefit to these non-project children depends on how the project children are scheduled for their remedial instruction and how the remaining children are treated during their absence.